

William Shatner's real-life close encounter . . .

William Shatner — who's visited every corner of the galaxy in his 25 years as "Star Trek's" Captain Kirk — has revealed how a close encounter with a UFO once saved his life when he was lost in the desert.

Shatner — who soars into the cosmos one more time in the new movie, "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country" — says the amazing encounter took place after he fell off his motorcycle in California's blistering Mojave Desert. He recalls being led to safety by a stranger, and then seeing some sort of UFO in the distance.

Shatner, 60, tells of his experience in an interview released by the New York Center for UFO Research.

It began when he and a group of friends motorcycled into the Mojave Desert near Palmdale, Calif., one day in the 1960s.

He was at the rear of the pack when he fell from his cycle and was knocked unconscious.

Shatner says his friends hadn't stopped to help him because they didn't realize until they were many miles away that he was no longer with the group.

As he came to, he realized he was in dire trouble. The hot sun was beating down, and his throat was parched. But, suddenly, "I thought I saw and heard something," Shatner says. "After that, I didn't feel as weak and dehydrated anymore. It was more a sensing, a feeling, a shadowy phantom. All I know is that I felt better."

Shatner lifted the heavy motorcycle off its side, but the engine wouldn't start, so he began slowly pushing it along. He quickly grew tired again, and then, squinting into the sun, he saw something in the distance.

"I thought I saw somebody, another cyclist, waving me on," says Shatner. "So I

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Capt. Kirk: UFO saved my life



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"I thought I saw somebody, another cyclist, waving me on," says Shatner. "So I continued to struggle with the heavy metal monster until I stumbled upon civili-

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The gas station provided cool relief for Shatner, who realized how close he'd come

to dying from the heat.

But his amazing experiences with extraterrestrial visions were not yet over. "It was then, off in the distance, that I saw an object glistening in the heavens," he recalls.

To this day, he still wonders who — or what — gave him the strength to escape death in the desert.

Says the UFO Research Center's director, Michael Luckman: "Ironically, the

entire 'Star Trek' phenomenon as we know it may never have existed had it not been for the appearance of that UFO. Shatner almost certainly would have died in that desert heat."

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The man who composed 'Taps' couldn't play a note

"Taps," the inspiring bugle call of America's Armed Forces, was created by a Civil War general with no musical training whatsoever — who composed it by whistling the haunting notes to his bugler.

Union Gen. Daniel Butterfield came up with the plaintive tune a week after the June 1862 Battle of Gaines Mill near Richmond, Va., where he won the Medal of Honor for bravery under fire.

Though seriously wounded in the battle, Gen. Butterfield's concern was for his exhausted and bloodied soldiers — and he felt they needed a tune to comfort them.

On the night of July 1 the 30-

year-old general began turning various musical phrases over in his mind, searching for just the right combination of notes that would boost the morale of his men.

Next morning he summoned his brigade bugler, Oliver Norton, and whistled to Norton the simple yet touching tune he'd settled on.

The bugler blew the 24-note mel-

*Haunting tune
was whistled
by a wounded
Union general*

ody several times as the general hummed and whistled changes until he was satisfied with the call.

Norton wrote down the notes on the back of an old envelope and played taps for the troops that evening.

"The music was beautiful on that still summer night," the bugler later recalled, "and was heard beyond the limits of the Butterfield Brigade as it echoed through the valleys."

"The next morning, buglers from other brigades came to inquire about the new taps and to learn how to sound it."

Only days later the tradition of playing taps at military funerals began. An Army captain, fearing the

traditional firing of rifle volleys over a soldier's grave might trigger shooting from Confederate lines, told his bugler to "just sound taps."

The call quickly spread throughout the Army — and was even picked up by the Confederates, who played it at the funeral of Gen. Stonewall Jackson in 1863.

Taps was officially adopted by the Army in 1874.

It's been used for lights-out, military funerals and memorial services ever since.

Gen. Butterfield died in 1901 and was buried at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point — to the sounds of the mournful yet thrilling tune he had given his country.

— LARRY MASIDLOVER

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